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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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● (1300)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I'm going to call to order the 116th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration of this 42nd Parliament. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), a meeting has been requested by four members of the committee to discuss the committee undertaking a study of the federal government's response to the impact of the increased number of asylum seekers crossing into Canada from the United States.

[*Translation*]

Welcome everyone.

[*English*]

Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): I'm sorry, I just want to get on the speakers list.

The Chair: You're on it.

Just to set the context for the meeting, as people know, under the Standing Orders, if any four members of a committee request that a meeting of a standing committee be held, it must be held within five days of the request being received by the clerk, and 48 hours' notice needs to be given of said meeting. This meeting is in response to the request by four members who have a specific agenda item they'd like to bring today. Our meeting, while it concerns the business of the committee, is not the same as our other business meetings, and we'll be restricted to dealing with the topic at hand, which the four members of the committee have requested that we deal with.

The suspicion is that we will entertain a notice of motion that has already been given. I'm going to turn to Ms. Rempel to begin that, and Ms. Kwan is on the speakers list.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just as a point of clarification, based on your comments, my understanding is that you have achieved consensus that the matter at hand in the letter sent to you will be accepted.

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay. Thank you.

I want to lay out my rationale for requesting this meeting and why I think it's really important for us to have a study prior to the House's sitting in the fall and important to have the minister attend and important that we actually have two meetings so that we can have other witnesses. My preference would be that we extend the opportunity to some of our provincial counterparts to get on the record some of their needs with regard to the situation. I'm going to try to do this in as non-partisan a manner as possible. I hope we can get consensus at the committee today.

I feel that Canada's immigration system should be planned; it should be orderly; and it should be compassionate.

Mr. Chair, for clarification, you will entertain my notice of motion today and you will find that in order?

The Chair: If you would like to present it at the start, it's very much in order.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

I will move the motion that I've given notice for:

> That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration undertake a study to review the adequacy of the federal government's response to the impact of increased asylum seekers crossing into Canada from the United States; that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship appear before the Committee for the purposes of this study; that this study be comprised of at least two meetings; and that this study be completed by no later than August 3, 2018.

I am moving this motion today because evidence has mounted that Canada's immigration system has taken a marked departure from the principle of being run in a planned, orderly, and compassionate manner. As parliamentarians, we have a responsibility to hold the government to account on this point for the sake of those seeking to come to Canada, newcomers to Canada, and Canadian taxpayers. I ask for your support on this motion. I will lay out my evidence for the statement I have just made, as well as the rationale as to why it's critical that we have these meetings as soon as possible.

I think that regardless of our political affiliation, I would hope we would agree that managing a compassionate and humanitarian system means ensuring that Canada is prioritizing the world's most vulnerable in our resettlement efforts. I also hope we would all agree that it means that those coming into Canada are encouraged and supported to integrate into the social and economic fabric of our country. This means ensuring that newcomers learn one of Canada's official languages so that they do not experience long-term inclusion issues; are able to overcome any trauma they experienced in fleeing their home countries; and are able to acquire skills, find gainful employment, and contribute as productive members of our community.

In all of these points, as parliamentarians we cannot allow long-term reliance on social supports to become the norm or an acceptable path for humanitarian immigrants. We can also not allow our humanitarian immigration system to become overburdened by those who will never have their asylum claims validated. If this happens, we will see an increased strain on Canada's social supports and decreased tolerance for immigration in Canada writ large. This is something that, again, regardless of political stripe, I would hope none of us on this committee would desire to occur.

In the context of a country with a generous social welfare system like Canada's, it takes a high degree of planning and budgeting to make this happen. It takes data and constant monitoring of the processes related to the selection, screening, and then support of humanitarian immigrants. The instinct of some of you, especially those of you in the Liberal caucus, might be to become defensive and suggest that Canada isn't at risk of this happening, that there is nothing wrong with Canada's system at present. But before you do, I would ask you to take a step back and reflect on some of the following data points. I ask you to do so with open minds. Parliamentarians do not have government appointments, and as such have a primary responsibility to hold the government to account for its decisions, regardless of political affiliation.

I will start my argument by providing some important context on the capacity of our system to successfully respond to the issue that is occurring at Roxham Road. Since early 2016, Canada has resettled nearly 50,000 Syrian refugees. This was a massive initiative that was well above the usual year-over-year humanitarian immigration numbers that Canada plans for in its immigration levels plan. In testimony to our committee in 2016, many people from the Syrian refugee cohort and those related to the settlement efforts stated that Syrian refugees came from primarily rural agrarian backgrounds, had literacy challenges in their first language, suffered trauma from war, did not have large amounts of formal education, and as such would face more integration challenges in the context of Canada's developed economy than previous cohorts of humanitarian immigrants.

In short, this cohort of people have a lot of complex needs that require intense planning and budgeting to ensure that they successfully integrate into Canada. In 2016 this committee studied the needs of resettlement service providers following the Syrian initiative and heard from provincial and municipal leaders that the lack of additional resettlement services funding, or any transfers to the provincial health and education system, made it difficult to adequately plan for or monitor the integration of the Syrian refugee cohort into Canadian society.

Indeed, today federal Auditor General Michael Ferguson has expressed his extreme concern in the government's failure to provide transparent progress reports on the integration of Syrian refugees into Canada. We have no data on how many are employed, how many have learned one of Canada's official languages, or the cost of providing social welfare programs to these nearly 50,000 people. The last time the minister provided an update to this committee on this issue was well over a year ago, and at that time he stated that 90% of the government-sponsored Syrian refugees were unemployed. Since then, the one-year funding provided by the federal government has expired. Based on this data that he provided, it is reasonable to suggest that many of the Syrian cohort will be drawing income from provincial social welfare programs. Further, many IRCC staff were at the time redirected to processing applications of Syrian refugees.

This context is important to consider in relation to the motion at hand, because prior to the influx of asylum seekers who had already reached the United States, Canada's system was struggling to adapt to the processing and integration needs of the Syrian cohort.

● (1305)

You don't have to take my word for it. Many of you heard from resettlement services providers and from Syrian refugees themselves at this committee when we studied the issue in 2016. Then January 2017 happened. In January 2017, the Americans issued an executive order related to their immigration policy. In an unprompted response that has since been described by a *National Post* columnist as being "holier than thou", Canada's Prime Minister sent out a tweet that prompted tens of thousands of people to use a loophole in an agreement we have with the United States, which prevents asylum claim shopping, to illegally cross the border from the United States into Canada and subsequently claim asylum.

Again, you don't have to take my word on this. Media reports have shown the flurry of memos between embassies and the IRCC showing that this tweet was viewed as an open invitation to come to Canada. The number of people who have made this journey since January 2017 is 31,377. This is the highest level of unplanned immigration in recent Canadian history. It is unplanned because it blows the government's predictions for asylum seekers, outlined in its immigration levels plan, out of the water. In no scenario presented to Parliament or to this committee has the Minister or the Prime Minister laid out a scenario in which there is a plan for tens of thousands of people to enter Canada via this method. Since then, we as parliamentarians have no idea how much the government at the federal level has spent on tents, RCMP and CBSA overtime, transport, accommodation, news staff, consultants, ministerial travel, and on and on related to the crisis at Roxham Road.

We also have no idea how much the provincial governments have been required to spend on welfare, subsidized housing, emergency housing, food banks, education, day care, health care, and other costs related to those crossing at Roxham Road. We also have no idea how much the government is planning to have to spend on the eventual removals of those found to have invalid asylum claims. We know that the Immigration and Refugee Board is at a crisis point with internal memos suggesting that it will take years for someone who enters Roxham Road today even to have their refugee claim heard, which make calculating the long-term impact on federal and provincial social program budgets that much more difficult.

We as parliamentarians have received no information from the government on the expected needs of those crossing at Roxham Road. Do they speak one of Canada's official languages? Are they capable of working? Do they have skill sets that will meet the labour market demands of Canada's economy, and if so, will they settle in regions where those skills are needed? How is the government planning to ensure that this will happen? Will this impact other immigration streams?

We also have no information from the government on how many people it expects to illegally cross into Canada from the United States and subsequently claim asylum in the coming years and months. Rather, it has begun to use language that normalizes having over 1,000 people enter Canada this way per month, which is an exceptionally large increase from the numbers in recent history. For example, the Minister recently tweeted out statistics that show an increase in June numbers year over year from 2017 to 2018 and suggested that this was a decrease in demand. At this point, it is becoming apparent to me that the government has done little analysis on the entire issue. This is even more concerning because the government has not expressed any desire to explore legislative options to close the loophole in the safe third country agreement, suggesting that it is content to allow the demand on our system to become a permanent phenomenon, and indeed today I would suggest that the government has made a policy decision to normalize this situation.

I know that we all diverge on policy approaches with regard to the safe third country agreement, and I respect that. I will, however, say that I find it unacceptable that we are allowing people who have already reached the United States of America, one of the freest democracies in the world regardless of who occupies the White House, to claim asylum in Canada via a loophole in an agreement that by the government's own admission and by the Prime Minister's own admission in the House of Commons is still valid. I believe that by failing to close the loophole in the safe third country agreement, the government has made a formal policy decision to normalize having tens of thousands of people illegally crossing the border from the United States, and this has not been reflected in any immigration levels plan or formal budgetary process.

Regardless of how you feel about this decision, as to whether or not it is right, it has been made, and Canadians now need information on how much this will cost them and how people will be integrated into Canada. The situation has been occurring for over a year and a half. It is irresponsible for us as parliamentarians to allow the government to allocate piecemeal hundreds of millions of dollars outside of the budgetary cycle when it has known for 18 months that this is an issue and it hasn't addressed it in a federal budget or estimates process. It is irresponsible for us to allow it to spend this money, piecemeal or not, without understanding the assumptions the government has based these decisions on as I've outlined above. It is irresponsible for us to allow it to spend this money without discussing the opportunity cost of this decision. The federal government is already running a deficit of billions of dollars, and this allocation of funds could be used to increase the processing efficacy of other immigration streams for those seeking to enter the country legally via the PSR stream, family reunification, and others methods. These funds could also be used to provide social supports for Canadians.

● (1310)

Canadians need this information, because if they don't have it, then they will lose faith in the ability of the government to run an immigration system that benefits the country and those who are most in need. They also need this information right now before hundreds of people are turned out of homeless shelters on August 9 and before the House sits again in September. We're months away from the estimates process, and the government is making significant unbudgeted funding announcements without any of this information being provided to Parliament while it knows that this has been an issue for over 18 months.

I would like to thank Mr. Maguire for requesting that the Parliamentary Budget Officer conduct a system-wide review of the federal government's expenditures on the Roxham Road crisis, and it's my understanding that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has agreed to this request. Given that departments like the CBSA and IRCC have been late or delinquent on questions raised by parliamentarians in committee in this regard, I would also like the opportunity to ask the Minister whether he intends to direct his department to fully comply with the PBO's inquiry.

We also need to learn how the government intends to prioritize those crossing at Roxham Road after they have already reached the United States, in the context of the ethnic cleansing happening to the Rohingya people, persecuted minorities languishing in UN refugee camps in the Middle East, and so on. There are many demands on us from agencies such as UNHCR to take more government-sponsored refugees. Now that the government has made a policy decision to normalize what is happening at Roxham Road and not to close the loophole in the safe third country agreement, we need to understand how this is going to affect other resettlement requests of our system.

We also need to understand directly from the provinces what their needs are and what their expectations are for federal government support before we can assess whether or not the federal government's response is adequate. Based on what happened in Winnipeg on Friday, I don't think the government's line that this is a team effort and that it expects the provinces to just pick it up without understanding this data and seeing a long-term plan reflected in both the levels plan and our budgetary process is going to cut it any longer. In fact, I think it's irresponsible with regard to both the people who are entering Canada and Canadian taxpayers.

According to a recent poll published in a Canadian newspaper, 70% of Canadians are saying that they don't feel that the federal government has an adequate plan to address this issue. We need these meetings now, not in September, and the Minister needs to be here. Asking these questions of a government and ensuring that it has a plan that addresses all of these unanswered questions is the most Canadian thing that any of us sitting around this table can do.

Look, Canada is unique in that all of our political parties support immigration. We diverge on how that happens, but the reality is that in Canada in the last 18 months we've seen a marked departure from normal immigration processes, and the government has made—by default or by ignoring it or whatever—a significant policy change by refusing to look at legislative options to close the loophole in the safe third country agreement. #WelcometoCanada has changed our humanitarian immigration system. We do not have any of the data that I have outlined here, and that fact is starting to bear very negative fruit.

With regard to all of the concerns I have raised, we can differ on policy options, but the government needs to respond to these questions now. In the last few days I've seen some really disappointing things come out of the Prime Minister's Office, such as calling an Ontario cabinet minister who is in charge of women's services alt right because she's asking this question. Look, we can disagree on policy. We're not disagreeing on whether there should be immigration. We're just asking questions on how the government intends to do it. It's not going to cut it for us to meet again at the end of September, because we know this Minister is going to have to commit a significant amount of money to the provinces in order to just cover some of the concerns that are being raised by Mayor John Tory or Mayor Watson.

As parliamentarians, we don't hold executive positions in government. Our job is to hold the government to account. I know it might be difficult for Liberal colleagues to do that, but I ask, in order to get back to what we're supposed to be doing with the immigration committee, that we have the Minister here and that we really subject him to some rigour on these questions. The government's response even in just providing information has been completely inadequate. We also now need to hear from the provincial governments. Many of our provincial governments are in significant deficit situations. Many of our provincial governments are in a position of having had to raise taxes.

● (1315)

I'm really worried about that 70% figure, because it is something that could easily translate into a loss of social licence in Canada for our humanitarian immigration system. As someone who has argued for the government to bring refugees to Canada, I don't want to see that happen. I would hope in the next week that at a minimum we could have the Minister here, that he would comport himself with dignity and with the respect of parliamentarians to answer some of these questions, and that there would be the opportunity for our provincial counterparts to do the same. Then, over the summer and over the fall session, we could start to hold the government to account for the need to have a more cohesive plan to address these issues.

I don't find it fun to go out in front of a microphone in a scrum after the Minister goes out every second week and announces $50 million here and $100 million there. I had to respond to the Liberals' plan, to the government's plan, to "triage" people who had crossed at Roxham Road and to put them on a bus to Toronto, and, now that the homeless shelter capacity in Toronto is oversubscribed, to put them on a bus to parts unknown. These are people's lives. There are reports coming out of the IRB about it taking years for claims to be processed. That's wrong for so many reasons. A quick and efficient IRB process, if the demand on the system were lower, I think would prevent some of this from happening, but the reality is that the government has made a policy decision that is going to keep the demand on IRCC really high for a long period of time. We have to ask ourselves as parliamentarians whether appointing and setting up an entire expanded bureaucracy for people, many of whom will not have valid asylum claims, is the best use of taxpayer money. I might argue no, and others might argue yes, but we need to have that discussion if the government is not going to close the loophole in the agreement, which is where we are. I also think that type of a system is really detrimental to people who have come to Canada, because how do you put down roots and get a job if it's going to take seven years for you to have your asylum claim processed?

We've had the Minister before committee before. I questioned him for four hours in the committee of the whole, and we still don't have a plan. We need to do this right now. We can't wait for two and a half months. Through you, Mr. Chair, and to all of my colleagues regardless of political stripe, let's at least get the Minister here and let's at least have our provincial counterparts sit down so that we can start doing our job as parliamentarians and fixing the crisis situation we're in right now.

Thank you.

● (1320)

The Chair: Thank you.

Just before I turn to Ms. Kwan, who is next on the list, I want to remind folks that there are some people who think we will be doing a study today. I know that word got out there. The meeting today is about doing a study, just to make that clear. The rules of procedure for calling meetings and for calling witnesses if the committee decides to have meetings will fall into place.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would first like to thank all the committee members who are here, who have interrupted their constituency time and time with their family over the summer. I do think this is important work, and that's why I agreed to call for this meeting.

The situation we're faced with is a situation that I think we saw coming, frankly—at least I did—in January of 2017 when one of the first acts of Mr. Trump when he became president was to bring forth the travel ban. You'll recall, Mr. Chair and committee members, that right off the bat we returned to the House of Commons, and at that time I moved that we have an emergency debate. The Speaker granted that emergency debate, and we had a robust debate about the situation. At that time I proposed five different suggestions for how to address the situation.

I'm going to touch on some of those issues, because I still think that some of the suggestions that were presented at that time are relevant to the situation today. Every time the Trump administration brought in some policy, many of which, frankly, were racist and discriminatory and targeted a particular community, we saw a reaction. We saw a reaction and Canada was impacted and has been impacted and continues to be impacted in that regard.

At the moment the Prime Minister tweeted out how Canada would welcome asylum seekers and welcome the faces of the world, I, as a parliamentarian, as a Canadian, and as an immigrant who came to this country, have to tell you I was very proud notwithstanding that I am NDP. At that moment, I was proud of the Prime Minister for doing that. What was needed though, I would say, was to follow with action and to ensure that the action matched the words, because when we don't do that, I think we end up with the situation that's before us right now.

First off, I want to address an issue. This has bothered me for some time. People continue to use terminology that misrepresents the situation, and I think it's unfortunate. People insist on calling asylum seekers illegals, and I have to tell you once again, Mr. Chair, that asylum seekers are not illegals. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act clearly states that when a person crosses into Canada at an irregular border crossing, they are not committing a criminal offence. I think it is incumbent on all of us not to play politics by using terminology that does not help the situation. When you paint a person as an "illegal", you set in the minds and hearts of people that somehow those people should have no right to be here in Canada when in fact that is not true. Canada signed on to the UN convention and protocol for refugees, and as long as we are a signatory to those conventions, we do have our borders open, and asylum seekers who come to seek safety are not illegals.

I just want to say that very clearly to the people who insist on using this terminology. I ask them to please cease and desist, because using that kind of language does not help the situation. It is not helpful for the asylum seekers. It is not helpful to Canada. It is not helpful to the people who are in dire situations, vulnerable children who need to get to safety. It is not good for the future of Canada. I say over and over again that I am so proud of Canada for having learned from our past mistakes with regard to discriminatory policies and having gotten to where we are today, where we value and cherish the diversity of Canada. I say this all the time, every Canada Day, every July 1. I say this all the time. We are the faces of the world, and we welcome them. We welcome every single person. No matter who they are or where they come from, we welcome them, and we acknowledge that they contribute to Canada's multicultural mosaic economically, culturally, and politically in every realm. I ask people to choose their words carefully and not to paint people in a way that frankly misrepresents the situation.

● (1325)

The other issue I want to touch on is this, which we argue about. Part of the issue is the asylum seekers coming over from the United States through irregular crossings. That is the key issue we are faced with today. Why are people doing that? They are doing that because of Trump, I believe, and second, they are forced to cross over irregularly because of the safe third country agreement. Let us just be clear about that. When that happens, it impacts the border communities. We have a situation where we're constantly just trying to take an ad hoc approach. Flying by the seat of our pants, if you will, is what the government is doing to try to address the situation. I think we can do better. I really do.

Look at the situation. My colleague, the member from Calgary Nose Hill, insists that the United States is a safe country. Really? I have to ask this question: how could anybody think the United States is a safe country when we're witnessing what's happening today? First there was the travel ban, and then, not very long ago—we were all in this House when we saw it happen—the President literally brought in a policy and acted on it by ripping children away from their parents, throwing them in cages, and locking up the parents, and somehow thinks that is okay. On what planet is that a safe country for anyone when you show up at that border seeking safety and the first thing that happens to you is that someone comes to you and takes away your children? You don't know where they are being taken to. You don't know when you will see them again.

How is this a safe country? It is in violation, as we already know, of every single international law that you can possibly imagine. It is in violation of human rights. It is in violation of the rights of children, the most sacred thing that I think we as humanity have to honour—children—and yet this is happening. It's happened.

Yes, the U.S. has suspended it for the moment, but what next? In the meantime, 2,000 children have been separated. We're reading the stories. Even just today, stories have come up about how the children have been impacted, about when they've been reunited with their parents—the vacant faces, the damage that has already been done. We can only imagine what that would be like.

How on earth we can say that the United States is a safe country is beyond me. It's not about politics. It's about people. It's about vulnerable people. It's about children. It's about families. It's about humanity. That's what this is all about. We need to step up. Canada needs to step up. I have called for Canada to suspend the safe third country agreement over and over and over again, right from day one, since January of 2017, and I continue to ask the government to do so.

I was disturbed to read in the news and to hear the minister contemplate the very thing the Conservative members are suggesting, their only solution, which is to take a page out of the Trump administration and shut down our border to asylum seekers by declaring all 9,000 kilometres of the Canadian border with the safe third country agreement. The minister himself was contemplating this by using biometrics. I was shocked and dismayed to hear that, but there we are.

We need to look at this issue. We need to look at the issue around whether or not the United States is a safe country. I would argue that it isn't, because it does impact asylum seeking issues related to Canada.

On the issue around processing, let's be honest about this. There has been chronic underfunding of the IRB by successive governments—by the Liberals, by the Conservatives, and now by the Liberals. There's been chronic underfunding, and the IRB has been jammed because of its lack of resources. The lack of resources is so acute that....

● (1330)

To the credit of this government, when they came in they tried to address the legacy cases that were left over from the Conservatives, about 5,000 cases. To their credit, they tried to address it. The only problem is that they took existing resources to address the legacy cases. Robbing Peter to pay Paul does not solve the problem, but the government did that. Hence, we now have added pressure with the irregular crossings but no real additional resources until this budget, the 2018 budget, where the government put some money in. It's deficient. It's deficient to address the issue properly.

We heard about this not very long ago, right here at the committee, in studying the IRB and the complaints process. The interim chair came to the committee and said that even filling vacancies was a challenge for them. Why? Because they only have interim funding for two years. That's it. They said it's hard to attract talent to come to the table, because people know that it's not going to carry on. Who would give up their other job to actually commit to this position when they know it's only a temporary situation? That does not help the problem.

The government just came forward with a study, a consultant's report, on the IRB. We saw in the IRB the need for efficiencies. While we need to address the issue of efficiencies with the IRB, we need to resource the IRB so that we can address this issue properly. We also need to look at government policies that create additional backlog. They are government policies that are counterproductive to the work of the IRB. That actually jams up the IRB further. We're at risk, if we don't see resources put to the IRB, of seeing what I would say are legacy cases 2.0. That is what will happen if we don't deal with this effectively. I do hope that we will look at this issue.

On the question around the numbers, which are important, I have heard people say that we do not have a stream within our immigration system to address the irregular crossings. That is not true. We do have a stream in our immigration system to address that, and that is the protected persons stream. For the protected persons in Canada and dependants abroad class, it stipulates in the 2018 levels plan that we would accommodate 16,000 individuals in that category. That includes the irregular crossers. I will say this, though. The number in the levels plan is deficient to address the situation today. What's needed is for us to look at the levels plan and amend it accordingly to address the situation and to deal with the situation in terms of what's happening today.

If we don't, for those who will want to say that asylum seekers are somehow queue-jumping or that asylum seekers are taking away opportunities for government-assisted refugees to come to Canada or for immigrants to immigrate to Canada, for example, you will allow for that argument to continue and to fuel the misrepresentation and create a kind of fear in the hearts and minds of people. I don't think that's useful or helpful for anyone at all. I think it is important to address that issue in a concrete way, in a way that the levels plan allows for, in moving forward.

Then we look at the issue around resourcing. We have now deteriorated into a situation where you have the provincial minister bickering with our federal minister, the Minister of Immigration, resorting to name-calling. All of that, frankly, is also not useful and helpful.

● (1335)

What we need the government to do is to sit down seriously and to look at the situation. The fact of the matter is that with the increase in the number of asylum seekers, there has been an impact on provincial and municipal governments. We need to look at how we can deal with that in an effective way—not in an ad hoc way, as we have seen. What the government did in the beginning when we saw the first influx come into Manitoba in the dead of winter when people crossed over risking life and limb to come to Canada for safety was that it came late to the table. There was an impact on the local communities, on the border communities, who were trying to manage the situation. The government came to the table late in the day to try to address that and didn't provide the necessary resources to them. I travelled to the border in Manitoba last summer and talked to the NGOs there on the ground, and they told me they were still short of the money they had put out to address the asylum seekers. The federal government never compensated them for that effort and I think that's wrong. I do.

Then we saw the situation in Quebec and the Quebec provincial government coming to the federal government's table and asking for resources. Now we see the same thing going on with Ontario. Clearly there need to be additional resources. When the government made the announcement of $50 million, I supported it at the time, but I predicted right then and there it would not be sufficient to address the issue because this was an ongoing problem and that we needed to come up with a plan to deal with in the long term, but there wasn't one. There wasn't one and here we are again. It's like history is repeating itself and we don't learn from. As a result, we just keep generating this kind of situation where people want to misrepresent the situation and provide misinformation that will continue to be out there in the broader community. Again, that is not good for the asylum seekers, it's not good for government, and it's not good for anyone.

With this study, time is of the essence. The longer we wait and the longer we delay coming up with a fulsome plan to recommend to the government, the longer the situation will prevail. Then you will constantly be chasing the tail and constantly trying to address issues of misrepresentation and confusion out there, creating a sense of panic or crisis, as some people would call it. From my perspective this situation can be managed. It can and should be managed effectively; hence, you need to put in all the components that are important, as I mentioned earlier.

The last piece that I would throw in there and that is important to address is to look at an international strategy to deal with the situation. That includes how we work with out allies in the international community to address the problems that Trump is creating with his immigration policies. Canada is a middle power country. We have worked so hard for so long to earn this reputation, to be a fair minded, compassionate country that advocates for peace and is able to broker deals and assert an important voice in the international stage. I think we need to add that component to the study so we can come up with a strategy to address the source of the problem, that being the Trump administration.

Much is at stake here. Canada's reputation is at stake here. The integrity of Canada's immigration system is at stake. If we don't do this right, I fear we will live to regret it. If we don't address these issues, then Canada will be complicit in them. If we shut down our border, as my Conservative colleagues have suggested, by applying the safe third country agreement to the entire border of Canada, then we will complicit in the situation we face with the asylum seekers.

● (1340)

Asylum seekers who are fleeing to the United States because of gang violence will not be able to do so, because the Trump administration has already declared that it will not accept asylum seekers fleeing gang violence as a legitimate asylum claim. That is in violation of international laws. It's in violation of gender-related persecution laws. We know that a large segment of asylum seekers from Central America have this issue that they are faced with, and that is the basis of their asylum claim, and has been. For the United States to outright declare that it won't accept those asylum claims clearly indicates that there's a problem here.

Mr. Chair, I do support a study. I do support the motion to call for the minister to come before the committee, and for the officials to come before the committee, and for witnesses to be called to come before the committee. I hope that conversation will be a collaborative approach that says let's put all the ideas on the table and let's fairly evaluate them with the goal of effectively addressing the issue in accordance with the international laws we are signatory to—that would be a way forward—and that also says that resources are needed, that we should not eliminate the question of resources on the table but look at it and examine it fully to see what resources are necessary to address this issue in a fair and adequate way.

Finally, people will say there is a humanitarian crisis across the globe, and they are right. The UN has reported that there are close to 17 million people who are displaced. Canada, at the moment, even if you include the Syrian refugee initiative of 50,000—and, by the way, we haven't actually brought in the entire 50,000, but close enough—and all the other streams, our contribution to this humanitarian crisis is only 0.1%. In that context, Canada is doing something, but we are just doing a little bit of something.

Let us open our hearts and open our minds with this approach. Let us see the situation for what it is, and the problems that are being created as a result of the United States, and come up with wholesome solutions, and be part of the solution to the issue and not create further problems.

● (1345)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair and colleagues. Of course, we're all delighted to be back here on this very warm day, because I think we missed each other. We haven't seen each other in a while. I just want to address in broader terms this issue that we've been discussing now for well over a year, at least in the time since I've been on this committee.

On May 22 we passed a motion to study this issue during the summer. I know that was passed by consensus of all parties. Therefore, there's no question that this is an important issue that everyone wants to discuss and to be able to work out. But it's important to understand that there's been extensive engagement on this issue by the government, by the minister. There's been a plan from the outset that has developed over time, and that's what we've seen in the last two and a half years, a plan that has evolved commensurate with what's been happening at our border. If you look at our committee alone, we have discussed this issue on five separate occasions since last year. On five separate occasions we've had discussions.

Our minister has appeared here on six different occasions, if I'm not mistaken, to outline the work that he has done. The majority of the work and the questions that were asked of him were related to the border crossings. If you look at May 24—that's the day we had a committee of the whole—Minister Hussen spoke extensively to Parliament on many aspects of this issue. The staff has done an enormous amount of work, because every time they have come to committee they've been given piles of homework and they have continuously responded to every single request made by us or to the vast majority of the requests. Some may still be outstanding, but my recollection of this is that the vast majority of the requests made by individual members have been responded to by the staff.

Therefore, there's extensive information. The plan is quite clear. Notwithstanding this, there has been a culture, and frankly and sadly a very concentrated effort on misinformation.

Ms. Kwan, I fully endorse your assessment of the use of language in this context. It's very important and I think it's very easy to vilify people. I think that's what we've already done in some respects because of the type of language that has been used by many around government and many around our opposition. I think that's been harmful and it's going to do irreparable harm for the individuals who are actually here.

If we look at the debate that's ongoing, it is really divisive. I don't think it's constructive. It's divisive based on the politics of fear. We are "othering" those who are coming here. We've gone through this process a number of different times in our country's history and I don't think it's been helpful. I don't think it's been helpful when we circle a group of people and say that they are undesirable, or they're illegal, or they're not welcome here. It's a very dangerous road that we are taking. It's a very dangerous path, which I believe will really tarnish us in the long term. Notwithstanding that, we do believe is that every single one of those people is entitled to due process, and that's what they are getting.

I also want to just note that in the last two months and if you go back to early January, February, and March, as we sat through question period and many of the discussions, of course our friend here consistently maintained that it was anticipated that 400 or 600 people would be coming across the border every single day. In fact that was the assertion made by the Conservative opposition for a number of months, and, lo and behold, in April, which was the height of this issue, we had 83 asylum claims per day, not 400. In May we had 57 asylum claims per day, and in June we had 39.

● (1350)

In that sense, our numbers from April have been halved, or reduced by 50% in the last two months, and represent the lowest numbers of asylum claims since last June. While these numbers may go up and down, the reason I say this is that a lot of what we're hearing is based on a great deal of hysteria and misinformation, and really, efforts to try to divide Canadians on this issue.

Getting to the motion, I think it's very important to study the issue this summer. We have no particular opposition against it. However, I would like to expand on Ms. Rempel's motion, her notice of motion. I'd just like to amend it so that we would have a broader, more fulsome discussion on this issue.

Therefore, Mr. Chair, if you would indulge me, I'd like to read an amended motion at this point. Basically, it reads—and please stop me, Mr. Clerk, if I read it too fast—that, pursuant to Standing Order —

The Chair: Just one moment. Do you have it in writing for the clerk? Would you be able to give it to him?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: I do have it, yes: That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration undertake a study to review the impact of irregular border crossings at Canada's southern border, including on some provinces and municipalities; that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, be invited to appear before the Committee for the purposes of this study; that this study be comprised of at least two meetings; and that this study be completed by no later than August 3, 2018.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, may I just finish?

The Chair: No, I'm going to hear the point of order first.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you. Pursuant to the Standing Orders, I would argue that is not an amendment to the motion; it's an entirely different motion. I also believe that my colleague has not given notice of that motion. I think its language and scope are very different from mine. I would argue that an amendment to my motion would concern who would be appearing or at what time. I ask that you rule it out of order.

The Chair: I won't rule it out of order. I believe it's an amendment that does two things: first, it changes the word "adequacy" to "impact"; and I believe it adds two ministers. It expands the motion so that it would not just be the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship who would appear, but also two other ministers. I rule it to be a fair amendment. It was read as a whole thing, but perhaps it would be helpful if the member read out the amendments he actually wants to make, or the words he's substituting for the words in the original motion.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're changing the word "adequacy" to "impact".

The Chair: And, I believe, to avoid the second use of the word "impact", you've taken it out.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: That's right.

We're also saying.... Sorry, I'm looking at the original here.

The Chair: I heard you also add for specificity the words "the impact...on some provinces and municipalities", to expand it. Plus, you've added two ministers.

Is that correct? Am I understanding correctly?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: That's correct. That's the substance of it. In fact, it's very much in line with what Ms. Kwan as well as Ms. Rempel were outlining.

Just to conclude, Mr. Chair—I'm more or less done—yes, this is a very important issue. There's no question about it. Collectively, all three ministers have been engaged in it from day one. Minister Goodale has appeared here on a number of occasions and has outlined the precautions and measures he has taken, including the screening, both for health and security, and verification of identity. I think that's essential to this conversation. As well, Minister Duclos has been seized with it from day one, ensuring there's adequate support for the different social needs of those who are coming across.

Therefore, it's important that we do have the study. It is not a crisis, as outlined. It is something that I think we as a government have addressed holistically, and it's an ongoing issue. We've been reviewing it on an ongoing basis, but this will give us an opportunity to set the record straight and to ensure that we're moving forward in the right direction. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1355)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a point of clarification, has my colleague opposite struck the timing of the committee?

The Chair: No, it is still calling for two meetings before August 3.

An hon. member: At least two meetings.

The Chair: Yes, at least two meetings.

Just before we continue Ms. Kwan asked for a copy in writing, so the assistant has just gone out to get copies.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Chairman, I would like to challenge your ruling.

The Chair: Which ruling?

Mr. David Tilson: Your ruling that the amendment is in order. I think it's out of order for the reasons given by Ms. Rempel.

The Chair: That takes precedence now. There's a challenge to my ruling. I normally step out of the chair to hear that.

Actually, it's not debatable, so I'm not going to step out of the chair for that.

All in favour of supporting my ruling?

All opposed?

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, I think you have to call them one by one.

The Chair: You've asked for a recorded vote? Is that normal?

Mr. David Tilson: Yes, it's normal, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: We've had a request for a recorded vote by name. The clerk will now call the roll.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 3)

The Chair: My ruling that the amendment is in order is sustained.

Ms. Kwan, is it a point?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, it is. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

What I was asking for was that Mr. Anandasangaree read out his amendment again so that we can hear clearly where the changes are made, because I wasn't quite following it.

The Chair: We'll do that, and then we'll start a speakers list on the amendment.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: And then on the distribution of the amendment, is the amendment translated into French also?

The Chair: It is.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Fabulous. Thank you.

The Chair: Would you read it slowly? An assistant has gone to get copies of it.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: The amended motion would read:

> That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration undertake a study to review the impact of irregular border crossings at Canada's southern border, including on some provinces and municipalities; that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, be invited to appear before the committee for the purposes of this study; that this study be comprised of at least two meetings; and that this study be completed by no later than August 3, 2018.

● (1400)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a point of clarification, Mr. Chair, can we suspend briefly until we get a copy of this in writing? I need to see it.

The Chair: My position is always that if we have a request from a member to suspend, we do. The meeting will suspend for a few moments while we're waiting for a paper copy.

● (1400)

——————————— (Pause) ———————————

● (1405)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Michelle Rempel): Given that we have quorum at the table, we'll proceed.

I believe we're debating the substance of the amendment at this point. First of all—

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Can I ask a question? Sorry, I thought we had just suspended for a few minutes.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Michelle Rempel): Yes, but the chair left the room and we have quorum at the table. I believe your colleague just said he'd like to make an airline appointment, so I dispensed with the pleasantries so we could get on with business.

The Chair: I will assume the chair, please.

I may suspend the meeting at any moment, as is the chair's prerogative—just so that members know. Whether there's a quorum in the room or not, it is the chair's prerogative to both open and close meetings, and to suspend them. Thank you.

We have a speakers list on the amendment, which is in order.

Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, the reason I didn't support your ruling is that I think the words "impact" and "adequacy" actually are material to the scope of the study. This is predicated on my colleague opposite using the term as part of his rationale that the plan by the government is quite clear.

I think that in my opening arguments in support of the original wording of the motion, we went through the amount of data this committee is missing and the fact that the government has been making piecemeal announcements. To me that would suggest there isn't a plan.

In fact, between the time I made my statement and Ms. Kwan made hers, I saw a tweet by Rachel Aiello from CTV News that said, "Minutes before emergency immigration meeting gets underway in Ottawa, feds announce without details that they will 'actively support Toronto through housing support for asylum seekers.'" Again, this is a member of the media, the press gallery, noting that there are no details to this. We have no idea how much of a funding commitment this is at all. To me this is just another example.

I mean, I think it's rather rich that the government is doing this while we're all sitting in this committee here. So for my colleague to make the argument that there is a plan, look, I really don't think anyone's buying that, at this point. I think by sort of changing the language of the motion and suggesting....

There is no plan outside of piecemeal announcements. Again, we have a member of the press gallery noting that there were no details associated with it.

I'll also note that I received some information that the London city manager has been asked by a senior official in Toronto, the Toronto city manager, if municipalities in Ontario have any appropriate, immediately available, public or privately owned sites or facilities, including hotels, that could be used or repurposed as shelter spaces for refugees or asylum claimants. Why is the city manager of Toronto asking this question? Who is paying for hotel costs? Who is paying for these things? This is not information that's been provided to this committee. This is not information that has been provided at any point in time to any parliamentarian. These are the sorts of things where the public starts going, "Where are the details?"

Now, just because the issue of language has come up, I would like to quote the immigration minister from March 19, 2018, at this committee:

> I'm happy to use "illegal"....
>
> ...I have used the word "illegal" and I have used the word "irregular" and I think both are accurate.
>
> I have no qualms...using the term.

Given that two of my colleagues in here have brought this up—in a way, I think, to divert attention from the issue.... Yes, people have the ability to claim asylum in Canada, but the reality, according to the CBSA, the Minister of Public Safety, and the Minister of Immigration, is that they are illegally entering the country. I just take issue with the government side—I understand that my colleague from the NDP has to do this—trying to divert attention away from the fact that there isn't a plan by contradicting themselves over and over again. I think Canadians are at the point where they also understand the motivation for having this debate on semantics. I guess if the minister were here, I would ask him if he's now contradicting himself with the statement he made in committee, especially after he cast aspersions at our new colleague, who's the immigration minister in Ontario.

The other thing I really want to take issue with is my colleague's characterization of the response to this issue as "hysteria". Look, as a woman, I can't tell you the number of times I've been told I was hysterical. I think for the government to say that asking questions about whether or not this policy is now normalized, that the government....

We don't have a clear answer. I mean, we don't understand what the government will do. My colleague from the NDP is saying let's suspend the safe third country agreement. I'm making the argument that we should allow it to continue. Regardless, the government has not stated its policy on this. It's just hoping that everyone will turn a blind eye.

● (1410)

The reason I am arguing against the amendment is that this government has made a significant policy change. By not responding, it has responded, and it has said, through its actions by setting up a permanent space at Roxham Road—with permanent processing agents, permanent transport plans, and tent cities—and by asking municipal leaders to look at busing people to different homeless shelters, that it has made a decision that it is not going to enforce the safe third country agreement across the entire border. It is just saying, "Look, we're just going to enforce it at official points of entry, but we're not going to suspend it." There has been no public response on costing for this, or service delivery plans, or plans for integration.

With that, it's not reflected in the levels plan either, so there is no possible way that resettlement service providers can respond to this. It's not about the impact; it is about the adequacy of the response, because the government does not have a plan to date.

Just on the term of "hysteria", again, that's a very gendered term to use, Gary, first of all. And I think very few Canadians would argue that having a parliamentary committee study the costs associated with the government's policy change is hysterical. I don't understand why the Liberals' response to this has been to ratchet up words like "fear", "division", and "hysterical" and to spend all this time on the terminology "illegal" when they had their minister sit here and testify to the same months ago.

Now, I want to refute some of the points that my colleague also made with regard to the adequacy of the level of information that the government has provided to this committee. My colleague opposite, in his arguments for the amendment, seemed to suggest that the minister had provided Parliament with any sort of information around the numbers expected, the details of the needs and competencies of the cohort who are crossing Roxham Road, or of any of the meetings he has had with provinces with regard to the long-term welfare costs associated with this.

I would just say to put this aside for a minute. It is our job to ask these questions, and we just don't have that information here. Again, we can't actually assess the impact, because we don't understand the data. We don't even know if it is adequate, because there is no plan. I don't even know what this is.

The last thing I want to talk about is the due process. This government and my colleague opposite used some language suggesting that what they are getting is due process, but is it really accurate to suggest that for somebody who is claiming asylum in Canada it will likely take years to have an asylum claim heard? We have the Immigration and Refugee Board on the news today talking about what a crisis situation they're in. That is due process?

Again, part of this is the fact that we can't look at the impact of a plan because there isn't one. I want to see the adequacy of a response.

My colleague also made a comment about the 400 per day. That wasn't a figure that I put out; it was a figure that the Quebec government put out. The Quebec government did some analysis and looked at the current increase rate and it was projecting 400 per day. Then my colleague suggested that 39 people per day is somehow a victory, when it is actually more than June of last year. Again, I feel that the government is normalizing, through its members here on this committee, a situation that has become very difficult. I think that's really dangerous.

Without an accurate, costed plan having been presented to Canadians—because I don't feel that the government did have a mandate to change its policy on this to such a great extent—I do worry about people saying, "Well, maybe immigration isn't working right now."

He also made a comment about the piles of homework that we have given IRCC officials, and he said that a vast majority of this had been done. Public servants exist at our pleasure, to provide this information, because we have a mandate from our constituents to scrutinize the expenditure of public funds, and "vast majority" is not acceptable.

● (1415)

We still have outstanding requests from CBSA. This is why my colleague Larry Maguire has asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer to do an analysis, because maybe he'll have more luck than we have had. We don't understand whether the government is even going to acquiesce to some of these requests. So in terms of "piles of homework", that's their job, and I find it really difficult how every once in a while we have to threaten to raise points of privilege in here because it takes months and months before we get any sort of costing information.

The last point with regard to the minister providing adequate information to committee is that he is going out and expending public funds without any scrutiny on an ongoing basis. You know, the safe third country agreement aside, there are over 31,000 people in Canada right now who have come to Canada through Roxham Road or Emerson in the last year and a half. How are we supporting them when they're here? Are we just going to continue busing them around to hotels without any sort of plan? How much is that going to cost? That's not fair. That's not right. Can you imagine somebody being in a college dorm in Toronto right now and reading the news articles—if they are privileged enough to be able to read them—and finding out that on August 9 they might not have a place to go to? That's not a plan.

I understand why the Liberal members used the language that they did, because they're desperately trying to avoid scrutiny on this issue, but these are people's lives, and this is where the going gets tough, right? This is where the going gets tough. It's not about a photo op anymore. How welcoming is Canada? That's a question this committee should be seized with. So I refuse to support this amendment, Mr. Chair, and I would ask my colleagues opposite to really think about implying that the government has a plan here and trying to whitewash this motion.

To my colleague opposite, through you, Mr. Chair, I really think, and I would ask him to retract the term "hysterical", because I think that's what's going to be the clip tonight. I really don't think it behooves anyone in this room, or in Canada, or who has been crossing the road this way to say that a parliamentary committee asking for answers and holding the government to account on this is hysterical or is anti-Canadian. This is our job. This is Canada right here.

I don't support the motion, and I would ask my colleagues opposite, and especially implore up to the Prime Minister's right hand to stop with this and actually get the ministers and start holding them to account, because nobody buys this anymore, and it's damaging to people's lives. The amendment is poor. We should be supporting the main motion as worded. I think my colleague opposite from the NDP already said in her opening remarks that she would support it. Please don't try to soften this, because there isn't a plan and that's something that I hope the members would acknowledge.

● (1420)

The Chair: Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson: I have just two points, Mr. Chairman.

My colleague doesn't like the word "illegal". I'm just going to quote again the question I asked the minister at one of our former meetings. It was the question on border crossing from the United States:

> You've used the word "irregular" but almost everyone else uses the word "illegal". Mr. Cormier, Ms. Alleslev, and others have used the word "illegal".

The minister responded by saying:

> I'm happy to use "illegal"....

I responded with:

> ...because it is illegal.

In fact, a sign put up by the government on Roxham Road states:

> Stop
>
> It is illegal to cross the border here or any place other than a Port of Entry.
>
> You will be arrested and detained if you cross here.

I don't know what else.... Again, I'm repeating what Ms. Rempel said. I think you're trying to soften the seriousness of this whole issue. It's incredibly serious. We're concerned about the safety of our border. We're concerned about a whole slew of things. We also want to assist people who are waiting in refugee camps around the planet, who are facing persecution in dangerous places around the world and who must wait longer as more and more resources are spent processing people crossing into Canada from the United States.

This committee went over to Africa because we were concerned about the camps there. Well, we're continuing to work on that study, but this issue is taking away from the work that the government can be doing in other areas.

As far as the word is concerned, my colleague says, oh, we have a plan. Again, Ms. Rempel has adequately described that. There clearly is no plan other than spending money, and even in terms of spending money, it's not being spent. Premier Ford has asked for $72 million to deal with the influx of asylum seekers. Mayors in other cities are worried about whether asylum seekers are going to be shipped to their municipalities. My mayor in Orangeville, with a population of 30,000, is concerned about whether the Town of Orangeville will be asked to house some of these asylum seekers.

The issue is clearly out of control. I'm opposed to the amendment, because it's clearly watering down the motion put by Ms. Rempel. I think the amendment should be defeated.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to address a number of different points. On the issue of terminology, first off, I do think that both of my colleagues, Ms. Rempel and Mr. Tilson, are correct in what they have read into the record. I remember that meeting like it was yesterday, because I was genuinely upset at the fact that the minister capitulated and said on the public record that the use of the word "illegal" was the same as the word "irregular" to describe asylum seekers. I called on the minister to correct that terminology, to retract his misuse of the word "illegal" in this context. In fact, when we were dealing with the budget debate in the House of Commons, I subsequently raised that issue with the minister again. He ignored it and did not answer the question, but I did note that his terminology did change and he used the word "irregular" and has not used the word "illegal" since then.

I also note that in question period in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister himself used the word "illegal" to describe asylum seekers. I was very upset about that as well and rose on a point of order after question question to call on the Prime Minister to retract his use of that word and to apologize for it, which of course he didn't do.

When the government itself uses the wrong terminology, it does not help the situation because it allows people to talk about this very important issue as if it were somehow just about semantics. It's not just about semantics; these words have real meanings, and it is very different to call somebody "illegal" versus somebody who is doing something "irregular".

I think we all know that. I am not an expert on the English language, by any stretch of the imagination. I am an ESL student, but I know the difference between "illegal" and "irregular". It was inappropriate for the government to make that statement, both by the minister and the Prime Minister, and now we are caught in this situation. I do hope they will find the time to state very clearly on the public record a retraction of the use of these words so we can get on with the situation and deal with the matter.

I also heard Mr. Tilson say as well—and he is right—that there are a lot of people across the globe who are in need of resettlement support because they have been displaced for a whole variety of reasons. He is absolutely correct to say that.

However, let us not conflate the different streams of settlement and resettlement. The refugees who come under the stream of the government assisted program are entirely different from the stream of inland refugees. The levels plan actually indicates that. Inland refugees, who under the levels plan are called the protected persons in Canada and dependents abroad class, are in a different stream. Accepting more people under that stream does not take away from the stream of government assisted refugees, or the privately sponsored refugees for that matter. They are different streams, and I wish people would not conflate these different avenues for accessing resettlement support here in Canada, because when you do, you are creating confusion, misrepresentation, and fear in the hearts and minds of people, as though somehow one group of people is queue jumping over another, taking advantage of someone else when in fact that is not the case. That is not how Canada's immigration system is set up.

On the issue of the proposed amendment, I think it is important to look at the impact, absolutely. I also think it is important that when you look at the impact, you also look at the response to that impact.

● (1425)

If it is not generally accepted that the intent behind this motion—and perhaps I can get clarification from Gary on this—is to look at the government's response to the impact, then I do think we need to add those words in and, I would say, add, after "impact", the words "and the government's response", so that we can be clear. When you look at the impact, you are looking at the response as well. How else can you look at the impact if you don't look at the response?

Perhaps, just to be clear, in moving forward in an effort to address the concerns that Ms. Rempel has, that somehow this is meant to sidestep looking at the response, we can actually put those words in there. I would perhaps move this as a friendly amendment to this amendment to the motion, by adding "and the government's response" and the word "impact".

The Chair: Because our procedure doesn't allow friendly amendments, we'll take that as a subamendment, an amendment to the amendment. Is there any discussion on the subamendment?

● (1430)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right. If I could finish, then, I would move that as a subamendment to the amendment, just to be very clear, then.

The Chair: Very good.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The purpose here, really, is to get on with the study so that we can look at the issue. Then coming out of that process, we can determine whether or not it's adequate. I have a view about that; Ms. Rempel has a view about that, and we can let the study take its course.

The Chair: So the subamendment is to insert the words "and the government's response" following the words "the impact", so between the words "the impact of" and "regular". It's, "the impact of and the government's response to". Would that be okay?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's correct.

The Chair: It is, "the impact of and the government's response to irregular border crossings".

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes.

Now, the other thing I do want to raise on this motion is that I'm a little bit disturbed—

The Chair: We now have a subamendment on the floor.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Oh, we have to vote on this, and then I'll come back to the point.

The Chair: Is there any discussion about the subamendment?

(Subamendment agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Okay.

Now you can continue.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much for that.

I'm a little bit disturbed, and I hope that this will be accepted as a subamendment as well. The words "be invited" are included in here. Normally, in our motions, we invite the minister to appear. Our motions normally simply say that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship appear before the committee. It's not to say that we invite a minister. What I'm worried about is that if we make the invitation, they'll say, "Well, I'm too busy. I can't come." Then we have done our job. We have accommodated this motion, but then we actually didn't achieve the result of having the minister here.

I would ask that we strike the words, "be invited to" and simply have it read that these different ministers appear before the committee, Mr. Chair. Then that, I think, will set aside potential concerns that if the invitation has been extended that we have satisfied this motion, even if the ministers are not available to come to the committee.

The Chair: I've consulted with the clerk. It has been the normal procedure of this committee, since I've been here, to invite. That's the word we have used in the past. However, there is apparently no substantive difference between inviting and requesting. There's no difference in that, if it makes someone feel better, but the subamendment is in order to strike the words "be invited to". The line would read that the minister, etc., "appear before". The impact is still that an invitation will be extended to them.

Is there any discussion about that?

All in favour? Opposed?

Mr. David Tilson: It carries. One vote over there. That's all you have.

The Chair: The Chair will decide when it carries or not, thank you very much. Did everyone who wanted to vote have a chance to vote?

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, the vote was closed. One vote went up—

The Chair: I didn't close the vote.

Mr. David Tilson: What were you doing? You said "all those opposed"—

The Chair: I did not close the vote.

Mr. David Tilson: —one hand went up, and that's it.

The Chair: Mr. Tilson, you're out of order now unless you have a point and want to challenge the chair.

May I ask all in favour?

Any opposed?

(Subamendment agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: It is carried with one against.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, I have one last point to make regarding this amendment.

Given the fact that the amendment has included two additional ministers for a meeting of two hours, I think having three ministers and three sets of departmental officials come would stretch our time and ability to adequately pursue our discussion. I would like to make a suggestion, not an amendment to the motion but a suggestion, to say that when we set this meeting, we extend that meeting to a three-hour meeting as opposed to a two-hour meeting so that we can accommodate three ministers and three sets of officials more adequately.

If there is a requirement for me to incorporate that as a subamendment to the motion, I'm happy to do so, but if not, if it's understood that this is what we would do, and committee members agree with that approach, then I'm happy to leave that out.

● (1435)

The Chair: I've just consulted with the clerk. He said that especially in the summer, when the House is not sitting and our time is not constricted by other committee meetings, we can use that. Depending on the number of witnesses requested, in general we'll be able to move that. I get the point. We'll still have at least two meetings, maybe three meetings, which could happen in one day. Or it could be....

So we'll have that. I would appreciate the flexibility. I get the point. I think it's the will of the committee to have a thorough and exhaustive, if not exhausting, meeting.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

On that basis, I will support the amendment put forward by Mr. Anandasangaree, with the passage of subamendments I had also tabled.

The Chair: Mr. Paul-Hus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to inject some French into this lovely meeting, so you'll have a chance to practise a bit.

Although I am not allowed to vote, I can recommend that my fellow members not support the amendment. I would underscore that our motion struck a very good balance, including neither the word "irregular" nor the word "illegal". The government members are really playing up the rhetoric, having introduced the idea of irregular crossings into the motion. Clearly, they are trying to force the opposition to vote against it.

I don't know whether the members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration have been to Roxham Road, but as the public safety critic, I have been there twice. The first time, I went uninvited. My staff and I visited the access point on the American side of the border. In fact, I have a nice photo clearly showing that it is illegal to cross into Canada there. Members of the RCMP came up to me, and when I introduced myself, they told me that I couldn't cross the border there. When members of my staff started to advance, the police officers immediately asked them not to take another step because it was illegal.

A member of Parliament and political staffers—all Canadian—were clearly warned that they could not cross into Canada that way. Why, then, is the government playing word games?

Those following our proceedings today are wondering why so many of their tax dollars are being used to fund a never-ending discussion when what they really want is a plan.

Had the amendment sought to include the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, we would have supported it, obviously. I would be delighted to attend another meeting in order to discuss the problem with Minister Goodale. What I take issue with, though, is the use of word games in order to force opposition members to vote against the motion. As we see it, there is absolutely no denying that crossing the border in this way is illegal. It is a matter of border sovereignty and control. The way in which we manage asylum seekers is another issue we have to deal with. Be that as it may, crossing the border in this way is illegal, and that is clearly indicated, no matter what the NDP members claim.

I ask that the committee hold meetings in order to address the issue and that this element be withdrawn to allow for a unanimous vote so that we can forge ahead. Millions of Canadians are wondering what exactly we are accomplishing here.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: There is no one else on the list to speak to the amendment, so I'm going to call the question on the amendment to the motion. Would you like it read?

Mr. David Tilson: I'd like a recorded vote, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: A recorded vote has been requested. This is on the amendment, which has been amended already. The amendment to the motion is that we replace the words, "the adequacy of the federal government's response to the impact of increased asylum seekers crossing into Canada from the United States", with the words, "the impact of and the government's response to the irregular border crossing at Canada's southern border, including on some provinces and municipalities".

The second subamendment is that, after the words "the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship", we insert the words, "the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development".

Those are the two amendments, which are part of the one amendment, as amended by subamendment.

(Amendment as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 3)

The Chair: We are now returning to the original motion, now as amended.

I have Ms. Rempel on the list.

● (1440)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I'm fine, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Paul-Hus, you're also on the list. Did you want to add anything?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: No, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: No, I don't have anything more.

The Chair: Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson: I pass.

The Chair: Seeing no other speakers, I am going to call the question. I am assuming you'd like a recorded division as well.

Mr. David Tilson: Yes.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 9; nays 0 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: On one last point of business, I'd just like to note that we will be having at least two meetings prior to August 3. Those meetings will include a request to ministers to attend, as well as officials, as is our case, and witnesses. I'm going to ask that lists of witnesses be submitted to the clerk no later than 5 p.m. on Wednesday of this week so that we can continue as expeditiously as possible with the committee's desire to have two meetings.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Just for clarification, in terms of witnesses, how many witnesses' names should we be submitting? There is that allocation issue. I'm just wondering whether or not we're going to be following the allocation approach, or is there a different approach?

The Chair: My assumption, since I've been on this committee, has been that we'll follow the allocation approach. We will have 60% of the witnesses as recommended—please provide them in a ranked way—from the Liberal Party; 30% in a ranked way, please, from the Conservative Party; and 10% from the New Democratic Party. Regarding the number of witnesses, I just need a little bit of leeway. I will try to let you know as soon as I can. I'm going to try to work it. We have only one of our analysts with us today. I want to look at the lay of the land with our acting clerk as well, to try to figure out how many meetings we can get in. It's a little bit subject to when ministers are available. You've requested that three ministers attend in the summer. I need some flexibility to work around their schedules, and, I'm sure, we have a very strict time limit on this.

I suspect we'll get around 10 witnesses. There could be a few more or a few less, but around 10 witnesses will be what we'll have, given the fact that you've asked for a minimum of two meetings.

Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Given that three ministerial statements in a one-hour block wouldn't leave a lot of time for questions, I would ask that you have each of them at a separate meeting, and that this study would expand. Otherwise members won't be allowed questions and it will just be a government talking point festival.

The Chair: I will do my best to see how much time we can give. I know that your time is valuable. I am going to respect the motion that you just passed, and we will attempt to do our best to accommodate all your needs.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Actually, Mr. Chair, then I would move that the ministers appear not in one block, and that they would be separated so that we can—

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we've just passed this motion.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I am moving another motion.

Mr. Nick Whalen: If Ms. Rempel wants to move another motion, I guess we can debate it at another meeting.

● (1445)

Mr. David Tilson: We have lots of time, Mr. Whalen. We have a free 15 minutes.

The Chair: I think I know the answer on this, but I always like to check with the clerk. Just one moment, please.

My instinct was that because this is still on the topic of the meeting called under Standing Order 106(4), I would allow it, but I'd just like you to repeat the motion that you would like to have made.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Sure.

Mr. Chair, just as a preamble to this, given the scope of information that this committee is going to require and the scope of information each of these ministers will cover, as would be the norm with estimates, we would usually give an hour block to each minister. I would move that an hour block be allocated to each minister, separately, rather than having them all appear at one one-hour meeting.

I'm just thinking out loud here about how to word this. I would move, at your discretion in terms of scheduling, that each of the ministers that we have invited to appear be given a one-hour block each in order to maximize the amount of time available for questions.

The Chair: I have a speakers list with Mr. Tilson so far. Is there anybody else?

Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, you may recall that when Mr. Hussen and Mr. Goodale appeared, it was for one hour. I don't know what everybody else thought, but I found it very inadequate to divide one hour. That was with two ministers, so I shudder to think what it would be like with three ministers. We might get a question for each minister. I am exaggerating, but if they each spoke for five or 10 or eight minutes, or whatever your ruling deems it would be, that wouldn't leave much time to ask questions of those ministers, when the whole purpose of the meeting would be to have them clarify what their plan is for this issue.

Hopefully members will agree with Ms. Rempel's motion that one hour for three is inadequate, and that preferably there should be one hour for each minister.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think that was my intent when I said we should turn our meeting into a three-hour meeting so that we could accommodate the three ministers and their officials accordingly.

I am happy to support formalizing this motion, but at the same time I want to ensure that you have some flexibility to ensure that the ministers can appear before our committee.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Again, if we are going to go through the time and effort of having a study on this issue, it is incumbent upon us, and I would just ask government members.... I think the optics of voting down this request—especially since we're giving the chair the authority to schedule this at his discretion—would be pretty poor for the government side. There are a lot of questions to answer, and having three government statements at 10 minutes a pop really won't leave a lot of time for questions by the opposition. I don't imagine the government members being particularly hard hitting on this, so I would like to have more than one round with each minister. That's really what this amounts to.

I would ask that they put the issue of optics aside, and, if we are going through the expense and effort of this study, to support this motion.

The Chair: Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Chair, I know it's customary when you have more than one minister to reduce the time slots. I know typically, if I'm not mistaken, that we're in a 10-minute time slot. Other committees have done this by reducing the time from 10 minutes to seven minutes, or to six minutes, with a written statement. Most ministers do have written remarks, so I do believe that could be done. Oftentimes there is quite a bit of follow-up, as I indicated earlier, from these engagements as well, so I'm sure the ministers' offices will be able to follow up after that with written responses.

The Chair: Mr. Whalen, and then Ms. Rempel.

Mr. Nick Whalen: I'm happy to leave this to the chair's discretion when he schedules the meetings. I think that's the most appropriate way to deal with it, for all the reasons that have already been provided.

● (1450)

The Chair: Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Just for folks who might be watching, what we're talking about here, Mr. Chair, is that when you have three ministers come, and especially given the scope of the ministers' responsibilities—you have the Minister of Immigration responsible for processing and coming up with policies on how many people are coming into the country and under what circumstances; the Minister of Public Safety, who would be looking at the security of Canada's borders and screening; as well as the Minister of Employment, who deals essentially with all of the social programs in government—to allocate in one-hour block approximately seven minutes for the opposition to ask questions of all three of those ministers in one meeting would be wholly inadequate. I firmly believe that the optics on this would be that there was an effort by the government to not allow transparency on this issue, which is wrong.

I also believe that the comment my colleague opposite just made, "Don't worry, the ministers will follow up with you", is particularly unbelievable given the debacle that happened with the immigration minister in Winnipeg on Friday. I don't think anyone believes they would just follow up with us after we've almost had to move motions on parliamentary privilege to get dribs and drabs of information out of the departments, often months later. Thanks but no thanks on that line of questioning.

Mr. Chair, I know that your intent will be to schedule this as efficiently as possible. Again, just for people who are watching, if the government votes against this motion, what it would essentially say is that it would prefer to have three ministers give protracted statements, advertising government talking points, so that opposition members can't ask questions of them. Thank you.

The Chair: I'm just following the argument here. The Liberal side made an amendment to include a broader study with other ministers. It was voted against by the other side, but you want more time with them. I just want to clarify.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, as a point of clarification, you ascribed a motive to my rejection of the amendment that is not supported by my arguments.

Mr. David Tilson: We supported the motion as amended.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I argued against the amendment because I believe that the argument put forward by Mr. Anandasangaree was predicated on his assertion that the government had a plan. I'd ask you to retract that particular statement.

The Chair: I wasn't asserting it.

Mr. David Tilson: You were.

The Chair: I'm trying to sort out how we're trying to work this. I like to get the intent of the committee so that I can make sure we follow through exactly, as closely to the will of the committee as possible.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: There was a slight....

Well, I would find it somewhat out of character for a chair in a neutral position to ascribe motives.

The Chair: I wasn't ascribing motives.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I thank you for your retraction of that assertion.

The Chair: I'm not ascribing motives.

We have a motion on the floor to have three one-hour blocks of time within our minimum of two meetings—

Mr. David Tilson: No, that's not what the motion said; it was "at least two meetings".

The Chair: Yes, we'd have at least two meetings, but within those "at least two meetings" we would have three one-hour blocks of time for ministers.

Do you want this on division as well, or no?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Sure. Why not?

The Chair: I mean a recorded division.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Yes, and emails to offices afterwards.

(Motion as amended negatived: nays 5; yeas 4)

The Chair: Just as a note to the committee, I get that the intent of this is to make sure that the committee has enough time for several things. You want enough time for ministers, for officials, and for witnesses. In our limited amount of time, I will do my best to make sure that we have all of those covered.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a point of clarification, Mr. Chair, you actually missed a fairly important thing in that, that the opposition members be allowed to have time to ask questions of ministers. I think you conveniently left that out. I would like to know, first of all, whether you think that is important, and then how you plan to achieve that in terms of the scheduling of ministers.

● (1455)

The Chair: I will send out a notice of meeting and you'll see the agenda based on the motions that have been passed today.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: But just for a point of clarification, since you just summarized what you thought the committee thought was important, do you agree or disagree that—

The Chair: I will also add: in the questioning of, I'm assuming, ministers, witnesses, and officials who are important to all parties.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Just so that the committee is clear, what would you consider adequate time for opposition members with that number of ministers?

The Chair: I'm very pleased that the committee has a process whereby minutes of questioning are allocated to each of the parties appropriately. That was passed as a working principle of this committee, and we will follow that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Just to clarify, if you were to schedule three ministers in one one-hour block, that would leave approximately one seven-minute round each for the opposition members?

The Chair: I had no idea what the outcome of this meeting would be today, so I will take this back and I will work with the analyst and the clerk to ensure that the motions that were passed today are appropriately followed.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I'll take that as a no—

The Chair: I believe the committee would always have had appropriate time based on the structures that we've passed.

Ms. Kwan and Mr. Maguire.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know that the motion Ms. Rempel moved failed. I don't normally do this, but we did have an offside conversation, Mr. Chair. I had an offside conversation with you just now about adding the ministers and my concern about the adequacy of having our normal two-hour-block meeting to accommodate that. I made a suggestion, off the record, to say that if we can have a three-hour meeting so that we can accommodate those three ministers accordingly, I think that would be to everyone's advantage.

The goal of the work of the committee is to get the information it needs, and for committee members to ask questions, hopefully to work toward a solution that we can all agree on. That may or may never happen, but that is still the goal here. I hope you will undertake to do exactly that. I hope the ministers will understand the importance of this work and why committee members from all sides of the House have decided that we will come back in the middle of summer, taking time away from our constituencies as well as our families, to do this work. I hope they will accommodate us accordingly.

The Chair: I believe I responded to you in the affirmative, and my mind has not changed despite attempts to change it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It is so good to have that on the record.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

If we're going to have three ministers here, I think Canadians deserve to have three hours for them. However you put it together—you have the chairmanship role to play in that—I think Canadians expect there to be some obvious time for questioning on this to get some of the answers they don't think are happening today.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any other business?

The meeting is adjourned.

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